

Power rankings

Based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best ranking
Teams listed in order of last season's finish (2017 record)

KEY
SP Starting pitching
BP Bullpen
OFF Offense
DEF Defense

AMERICAN LEAGUE

EAST

CENTRAL

WEST

Team	Record	SP	BP	OFF	DEF	TOT	Preview
Red Sox	(93-69)	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	●●●● 5	17	Hoping J.D. Martinez gives them someone to replace long-time slugger David Ortiz after finishing last in AL in homers
Yankees	(91-71)	●●●● 4	●●●● 5	●●●● 5	●●●● 3	17	Figure to score a lot and strike out a lot; can new manager Aaron Boone handle the pressure cooker of New York?
Rays	(80-82)	●● 2	●●● 3	● 1	●●● 3	9	Sport new look after winter of trimming payroll; the Rays have a chance to be a lot more competitive than it appears on paper
Blue Jays	(76-86)	●●●● 3	●●●● 3	●● 2	●●● 3	11	Expectation is the Blue Jays will be left to compete for the second wild card; health concerns remain plentiful
Orioles	(75-87)	●●●● 2	●●●● 3	●●●● 3	●●●● 3	11	Improvement will rest on a power-laden lineup that needs Chris Davis and Mark Trumbo to rebound
Indians	(102-60)	●●●● 5	●●●● 5	●●●● 4	●●●● 5	19	Arguably baseball's strongest rotation; the Indians are poised to possibly end long championship drought
Twins	(85-77)	●●● 3	●●● 3	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	14	Have the talent and spunk to be right in the playoff mix after their massive 26-win turnaround last season
Royals	(80-82)	● 1	● 1	● 1	●●● 3	6	Supposed to be rebuilding year but unlikely return of Mike Moustakas and Alcides Escobar give hope
White Sox	(67-95)	● 1	● 1	●● 2	● 1	5	Going all-in on a rebuild before last season has sparked belief better days are ahead; loaded with promising young players
Tigers	(64-98)	● 1	● 1	●● 2	●●● 3	7	Biggest suspense this year might revolve around how GM Al Avila approaches the next few steps in the rebuild
Astros	(101-61)	●●●● 5	●●●● 5	●●●● 5	●● 2	17	With almost everyone back from last year's championship team, the Astros fully expect to contend for another title
Angels	(80-82)	●●● 3	●● 2	●●● 3	●●●● 5	13	Made several savvy offseason moves and are in position to end the eight-year stretch without a playoff victory
Mariners	(78-84)	●●● 3	●● 2	●●●● 4	●●● 3	12	Talented enough to compete for a wild card, but probably not good enough to catch the Astros
Rangers	(78-84)	●● 2	● 1	●●●● 4	●● 2	9	Coming off their second losing season in nine years, should be able to score runs again, but rotation is a question mark
Athletics	(75-87)	● 1	●●● 3	●●● 3	● 1	8	Signs of a potential turnaround but rebuilding will take time, especially in a division with multiple contenders

Tower of power

52-homer-hitting AL MVP runner-up and new 59-homer-hitting NL MVP teammate get ready to muscle up

Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton will take the field for the New York Yankees as just the second pair of teammates coming off seasons of 50 or more home runs. The only other time that happened was in 1962, when the Yankees' Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle attempted to follow up their historic season. In 1961, Maris set the single-season home run record with 61. Mantle kept pace until illness and injury limited him to 54.

They remain the only teammates to hit 50 or more home runs in the same season and their 115 combined home runs remain a record for two teammates. In 2017, Stanton racked up 59 home runs for the Miami Marlins and Judge, as a rookie, hit 52 for the Yankees for a combined 111 home runs. With this slugging duo, along with Gary Sanchez – who missed a month and still finished with 33 homers – the all-time record for most team home runs in a season might be in jeopardy.



DYNAMIC DUO

Pair of teammates to combine for 100 home runs in a single season:

YEAR	TEAM	PLAYER	HR	PLAYER	HR	TOTAL
1961	Yankees	Roger Maris	61	Mickey Mantle	54	115
2001	Giants	Barry Bonds	73	Rich Aurilia	37	110
1927	Yankees	Babe Ruth	60	Lou Gehrig	47	107
1998	Cardinals	Mark McGwire	70	Ray Lankford	31	101
2002	Rangers	Alex Rodriguez	57	Rafael Palmeiro	43	100

BIG BOPPERS

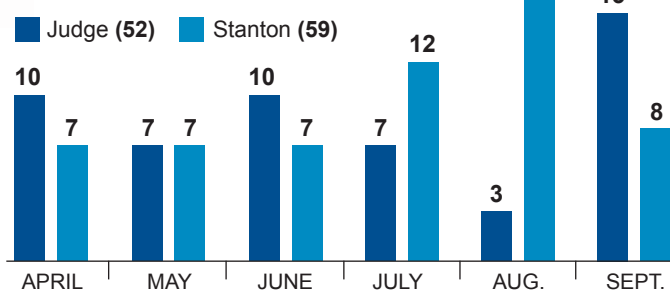
In 2017, the Yankees hit 241 home runs. With Stanton in the fold, can the 2018 pinstripers break the single-season team HR record?

MOST HOME RUNS HIT BY A TEAM IN A SEASON

1997	Seattle Mariners	264
2005	Texas Rangers	260
2010	Toronto Blue Jays	257
1996	Baltimore Orioles	257
2016	Baltimore Orioles	253

DINGER-LINGS

Home runs in 2017 by month:



Source: Major League Baseball

TRAFFIC CONTROL

Major League Baseball has imposed stricter limits on mound visits to six per game, per team without a pitching change in an effort to speed up games. The number of visits by a manager, coach or player in recent years has contributed to longer games.

AVERAGE TIME OF A 9-INNING GAME

YEAR	TIME
2017	3:05
2016	3:00
2015	2:56
2014	3:02
2013	2:58
2012	2:55
2011	2:51
2010	2:50
2009	2:51
2008	2:50
2007	2:51
2006	2:48
2005	2:46

Source: Baseball-Reference.com

MILESTONE WATCH

A look ahead in anticipation of some milestones that are within reach during the 2018 season:

3,000 Hits

Albert Pujols – (needs 32 hits) With 2,968 hits, the veteran slugger is within striking distance to become the 32nd member of the 3,000-hit club.

2,000 RBIs

Pujols – (needs 82 RBIs) Should join Hank Aaron and Alex Rodriguez as the only players in history with 600 homers, 3,000 hits and 2,000 RBI.

250 Wins

Bartolo Colon – (needs 10 wins) and **CC Sabathia** (needs 13 wins) The top two active leaders in career victories. If healthy, they should achieve their goal this season.

3,000 Strikeouts

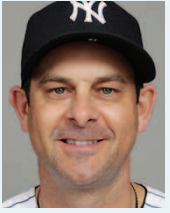



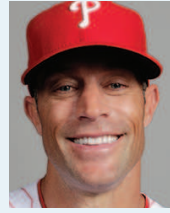

Sabathia – (needs 154 strikeouts) Enters the season with 2,846 Ks, third-most among left-handed pitchers in major league history behind Steve Carlton and Randy Johnson.

300 Saves

Craig Kimbrel – (needs 9 saves) Had 35 saves in 39 chances last year and led major league relievers with 16.43 strikeouts-per-nine innings.

FIELD GENERALS

Heading into the 2018 MLB season six new managers lead the charge for their respected clubs.

 <p>Aaron Boone New York Yankees</p> <p>Succeeds 10-year manager Joe Girardi. Never been a manager or coach at any level. A polished communicator. Spent a lifetime immersed in baseball, affording him a unique and intimate understanding of what fosters team success.</p>	 <p>Mickey Callaway New York Mets</p> <p>Replaces 68-year-old Terry Collins, the longest-tenured manager in Mets history. Driven by analytics and modern baseball philosophy, Callaway completed a five-year run as pitching coach for the Indians.</p>	 <p>Alex Cora Boston Red Sox</p> <p>In first major league managerial job. At 42, one of the youngest managers in franchise history, Cora has a unique chance to connect with his players. Retired as a player after failing to make the Cardinals in spring training of 2012.</p>	 <p>Ron Gardenhire Detroit Tigers</p> <p>Won over 1,000 games with the Twins but this is his first chance to manage since 2014. Tigers finished tied for the worst record in baseball a year ago, and not much is expected in 2018 from what is now a rebuilding franchise.</p>	 <p>Gabe Kapler Philadelphia Phillies</p> <p>First time managing in MLB. Phillies are hoping that Kapler's energy – along with several analytical philosophies – will be enough to get the team back to the playoffs for the first time in seven seasons.</p>	 <p>Dave Martinez Washington Nationals</p> <p>The 53-year-old Martinez was the bench coach for Joe Maddon and the Cubs the past three seasons and was with Maddon and the Rays for seven years before that. Played for nine MLB teams over 16 years.</p>
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Listed in order of 2017 record

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Teams ranked by AP Baseball Writer Mike Fitzpatrick

EAST

CENTRAL

WEST

Team	Record	SP	BP	OFF	DEF	TOT	Preview
Nationals	(97-65)	●●●● 5	●●●● 4	●●●● 5	●●●● 4	18	A World Series is the stated goal, and that's certainly not an outrageous aim, given all the talent assembled on basically the same team as last year
Marlins	(77-85)	● 1	●● 2	● 1	●● 2	6	Derek Jeter is used to winning but that is about to change after trading away half of last year's starting lineup
Braves	(72-90)	●● 2	●● 2	●● 2	●● 3	9	Still at least a year away from contending in the NL East, but improved starting pitching could push them closer to .500
Mets	(70-92)	●●●● 4	●●●● 3	●●●● 4	●●● 3	13	New manager Mickey Callaway had great success with Cleveland's arms and Mets are counting on his methods
Phillies	(66-96)	●●●● 2	●●●● 3	●●●● 3	●●● 3	11	Can not only end their five-year run of losing seasons but maybe even make a surprise push for a postseason berth
Cubs	(92-70)	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	●●●● 5	●●●● 5	18	World Series or bust; acquisition of Yu Darvish, gives Chicago a strong rotation, and the lineup is young, deep and dangerous
Brewers	(86-76)	●●● 3	●●● 3	●●●● 4	●● 2	12	Expectations are up after finishing one game out of the playoffs in what was supposed to be the second full season of a rebuild
Cardinals	(83-97)	●●● 3	●● 2	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	13	To snap that 2-year postseason "drought" they'll need bounce-back seasons from several players
Pirates	(75-87)	●● 2	●● 2	●● 2	●● 3	9	GM Neal Huntington insists he's not rebuilding, but traded Andrew McCutchen and Gerrit Cole
Reds	(68-94)	● 1	● 2	●● 3	●●●● 5	11	Have lost at least 90 games for three straight seasons; would be considered a breakthrough simply to move out of last place
Dodgers	(104-58)	●●●● 5	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	●●●● 4	17	Favorites to win a sixth straight NL West title with a roster that returns mostly intact; multitude of vets will be vying for playing time
D-backs	(93-69)	●●●● 4	●●● 3	●●●● 4	●● 2	13	With all five starters back and nearly every position player returning, they expect to be in thick of NL West race
Rockies	(87-75)	●● 2	●●● 3	●●●● 5	●●●● 4	16	Enhanced their bullpen in an effort to earn back-to-back postseason berths for the first time in franchise history
Padres	(71-91)	● 1	●● 2	●● 2	●● 2	7	More fun to watch this season with the addition of Eric Hosmer but still not expected to contend for another year
Giants	(64-98)	●● 2	●●● 3	●●● 3	●●● 4	12	Added Evan Longoria and Andrew McCutchen; Madison Bumgarner out 4-6 weeks with broken bone in pitching hand